

**TESTIMONY OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE  
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND  
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE  
IN OPPOSITION TO  
L.D. 190**

**“An Act to Allow Spearfishing for Northern Pike in Sebago Lake”**

**SPONSORED BY: Representative ORDWAY of Standish**

**CO-SPONSORED BY: Senator DAVIS of Piscataquis  
Senator DIAMOND of Cumberland  
Representative STEWART of Presque Isle  
Representative COREY of Windham  
Representative GINZLER of Bridgton  
Representative TURNER of Burlington Representative  
PICKETT of Dixfield  
Representative HANINGTON of Lincoln  
Representative HARRINGTON of Sanford**

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Good afternoon Senator Cyrway, Representative Duchesne and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Francis Brautigam, Fisheries Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 190**

I'd like to start by offering some background....

Northern Pike are not native to Maine and have been illegally introduced and spread by anglers. This invasive fish is not actively managed by the Department, and by that I mean pike are not afforded any deliberate regulatory protections. For example, there are no special regulations or general law fishing regulations established to conserve and enhance this fish.

Northern Pike were first identified in Sebago Lake during the early 2000's, and while they have established a self-sustaining population, they are not abundant and are not readily targeted and caught by anglers as they are in some other infested Maine waters. One reason for this is that Sebago has a mean water depth of 100 feet and maximum water depth of 300 feet; this very deep lake provides an abundance of cold water habitat,

which is why it supports one of the state's highest quality salmon and lake trout fisheries. Only a small fraction of the lake provides shallow weedy habitat, preferred by pike and particularly important for pike reproduction.

Because Sebago Lake supports salmon and lake trout fisheries of statewide importance, this lake is a destination for anglers from all over Maine and outside the State. Upon learning of the pike introduction, the Department was initially quite concerned that their presence would have direct and indirect impacts on the lake's premiere cold water sport fisheries; the salmon in particular, which are native to this lake and generally occur in much shallower water than lake trout.

However, fortunately to date there is little evidence of their impact. Very few anglers have reported cut lines attributed to feeding pike. Similarly, very few reports of scarring on game fish consistent with pike attacks have been reported. The only anglers who report catching pike are those fishing shallow coves for largemouth bass during the open water season. During the winter there are a couple very small coves where anglers can catch some pike, mostly juvenile pike. Overall, the pike presence and impact on the salmon and lake trout fisheries has been negligible. This situation is encouraging because no effective practical methods to control or eradication pike have been identified at Sebago.

Maine law currently requires recreational anglers to use conventional rod and reel fishing equipment; however, suckers may be harvested using other equipment, including a spear during the spring spawning run from April 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30. In my former position as Regional Fishery Biologist in the Sebago Lake region I would get calls most years from public members reporting "fish kills", resulting from the spearing of suckers that were left on the banks to rot and for nearby residents to tolerate or clean up.

So why would the Department oppose the use of spear fishing to harvest an invasive fish from one of the state's premiere salmon and lake trout fishing destinations? I would start by asking do the benefits outweigh the risks and challenges. I will offer some biological, social and management concerns for consideration.

Unlike conventional rod and reel fishing equipment, launching a spear projectile to impale a fish only offers one outcome, a dead or injured fish. This method does not lend itself to releasing a fish alive in the event a fish other than a pike is speared and would not be legal to harvest. Accurate identification of fish in the water is challenging, particularly if viewing from above. Some anglers have a difficult time identifying fish in hand, and would be challenged further by a more removed perspective. Because Sebago supports such an important fishery for salmon and lake trout, there are concerns that anglers will not differentiate (intentionally or not) sport fish reserved for rod and reel. It is my understanding that spear fishing in the mid-west is mostly done in the winter using a dark, unlighted ice shack, where a decoy is placed through a large hole in the ice. Therefore, fish that are impaled in the ice shack may not be viewed from the outside, creating challenges to enforcing LD 190.

Since pike were introduced to Sebago in the early 2000's, there have been few inquiries from anglers interested in using a spear to kill pike. Most anglers in Maine, even those who like to eat fish, commonly practice some level of catch and release fishing. I would not anticipate this new proposed opportunity to kill pike would be popular on Sebago, particularly given the relatively low density of pike in the lake. Furthermore, there are concerns that bored spear fishermen targeting pike might be driven to seize other illegal opportunities that might swim by. Since pike offer better table fare than suckers, it would be hoped that those who spear pike would harvest their quarry, so they would not be washing up on the shoreline of lake front properties; likely to be more problematic during the open water fishing season.

Earlier I spoke on LD 187, a **Resolve, To Establish a Commission To Simplify Maine's Fishing Rules**. During that testimony I discussed recent and ongoing efforts by the Department to simplify the fishing law book, making it easier to use and understand by the public. One of the reasons the fishing law book has gotten more complicated, is the Department has significantly expanded fishing and angler use opportunities in recent years, including year round fishing in the southern part of the State. Every time the Department accommodates new and expanded fishing opportunities it creates additional challenges to manage these opportunities and complicates law book simplification and reform. Advancement of LD 190 would create new use opportunities in Maine that will add more information to the law book, including at least a special regulation and definition, and may even include other regulation changes not yet anticipated. For example, some states that allow spear fishing have established maximum hole size regulations (MT/WI), and at least one state (MI) does not allow spearing on "trout lakes". The Department is concerned that advancement of this new use opportunity is inconsistent with and compromises ongoing efforts to further simplify the fishing law book. Since LD 190 does not address a conservation or resource management need, I urge the committee to consider the overall net public benefit of creating and managing a new sport and balancing that interest with the desire to simplify Maine's fishing law book.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.